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The Effects of Texting

With the advancement of technology is the last few decades, the way that people communicate has changed. Talking to each other on the phone was once the primary form of communication, but now messages can be sent digitally through emails, social media, and texting. Among these, texting seems to be the most widespread and accepted form of digital communication for the people of today. Texting is the act of using cellphones to send a written message from one person to another. Young people are the primary users of texting and this has led to many questions about its effects on people and the consequences of using it.

Texting’s effect on language, on academics, and on driving are all important topics of discussion. Because texting is a relatively new form of communication, its effects on language or the literacy and language development of young people have not yet been established. The opinions of researchers differ as to whether or not texting has a positive or a negative effect on language. When texting, some people use very little proper English and grammar which is why some fear that texting could negatively affect language.

Using cellphones and texting in the classroom has become more common among students nowadays. This behavior can be a distraction to students when they are trying to learn and negatively affect their academics. Because of this many schools have established rules that do not allow students to use their cellphones and text in class. However with more schools trying to integrate technology into the classroom to help students learn, it is important to understand the effects of things such as cellphone use and texting in the classroom have on academics.

One of the most discussed topics about texting is the dangers of texting while driving. In recent years a great deal of laws have been passed outlawing texting and driving. Much research has been done studying the effects of texting on drivers’ reaction times and driving abilities. Not only are young people the primary users of texting but they are also the most inexperienced drivers on the road. The combination of these risk factors and the potential dangerous consequences is why it is important to learn more about it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In her article “The Impact of Texting and Social Media on Students’ Academic Writing Skill” Angela Risto found that students use texting and social media as their primary way of communication (91). Risto also found that

When writing via text and social media, students characterized their writing as having spelling issues, slang, abbreviations, lack of grammar, lack of punctuation, emoticons, and symbols. Many also alluded to their reliance on autocorrect and the spellchecker features of their phones. Half of the student participants acknowledged that they realize that these characteristics inadvertently carry over into their academic writing, while the other half insisted that they differentiate between the two forms of writing. … Although some students stated they differentiate between academic writing and writing for text and social media, all students' writing samples contained some elements of writing related to text and social media which was discussed later in the interviews (93).

When students write their texts they do not always use proper English as they would with writing an academic paper. Whether or not they realize it, students use some of the characteristics of their texting when writing academic papers. The most common characteristic of texting that students use in their papers are punctuation errors and mistakes (Risto 108).

In their article “Undergraduates’ Text Messaging Language and Literacy Skills” Abbie Grace, Nenagh Kemp, Frances Heritage Martin, and Rauno Parrila stated “We conclude that there is inconsistent evidence for negative relationships between adults’ use of textisms and their literacy skills, and that these associations may be influenced by attitudes towards the appropriateness of textism use” (855). Their findings are similar to previous research and do not support the widespread idea that texting has a negative effect on people’s reading and writing. They go on to say:

Crucially, our results suggest that rather than textism use endangering literacy scores, textism use relies on a range of literacy skills that colour the relationship between textism use and literacy, just as early literacy experiences are related to current literacy skill. These skills include the ability to decipher textisms, to add common textisms to the mental lexicon for reuse, and to apply textism-specific conventions to create new textisms, including those that represent expression and tone of voice (e.g., blaaargh to express boredom). However, the results reported here did not include any significant positive correlations between textism use and literacy skills (Grace 869-870).

Texting does not use fewer literary skills than conventional writing, but rather it uses different skills to write and understand. No negative correlation between texting and literacy was found.

Jeffrey H. Kuznekoff, Stevie Munz, and Scott Titsworth address the issue of cellphone usage and texting in the classroom in their article “Mobile Phones in the Classroom: Examining the Effects of Texting, Twitter, and Message Content on Student Learning.” Discussing the results of their study they say:

What this study has found is a fairly consistent trend: responding to relevant messages or creating relevant tweets did not appear to harm learning or recall, and was only detrimental to note-taking when done at a high frequency. … If the act of using mobile phones was itself distracting, and presumably detrimental to learning, we would see all groups that used mobile devices having lower scores, which we did not find. Instead, it was irrelevant messages or irrelevant tweets that had negative effects on learning and note-taking, and this negative effect was even more detrimental in the groups frequently engaged in unrelated messages (Kuznekoff 360).

Using cellphones is not necessarily a distraction to students in class and rather it is what you do with the cellphone that affects students. If students are using their cellphones to do something related to the class then it does not have a negative effect on their learning. But if students use cellphones for something unrelated to the class then it negatively affects their learning.

Sylvia E. McDonald talks about the effect of texting in class and grades in her article “The Effects and Predictor Value of In-Class Texting Behavior on Final Course Grades” saying:

The differences in the mean texting behavior are of particular relevance since the study showed there was a negative correlation in the relationship between in-class texting and final grade score. The more a student participated in in-class texting behavior, the lower their final grade … Attendance had no significance in final grade … While a student may be required to attend a college course, attendance is more than merely sitting in a classroom. Attendance should equate to actually interacting with the material and a deliberate awareness of the presented material (McDonald).

Students may be present in class but their behavior during class can play a big role in their grades. Texting in class prevents students from paying attention to the lecture and does not allow them to the material a well.

PRIMARY RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

To find out more about texting I decided conduct some research of my own. I created a survey asking college students about their texting habits and posted it online to gather responses. A survey was the research method I chose because it allowed me to gather information from multiple people and ask them several questions. My purpose in conducting this survey was to find out the effect that texting may have on students’ GPA. I hoped to find that texting more often or texting in class led to students having a lower GPA.

The survey included questions about the age, gender, and GPA of the participants as well as several questions about their texting habits. Questions about texting habits had a scale that answers could be chosen from that included “A lot”, “Sometimes”, “A little”, and “Not at all”. Organizing the questions like this allowed me to group the results of the survey and easily compare the outcomes. This did not allow students to write their own answer to the question which could have led to vague answers or a large variance in the answers.

The graph above shows the average GPA of college students based on their responses to four survey questions. As you can see in the graph above, for the questions “How often do you text?” students that text “a little” had a higher GPA than those who text “a lot” or “sometimes”. The results of the survey did not suggest that texting had an effect on the GPA of students. It was expected that the more often someone texted and the more they used improper grammar when texting that the lower their GPA would be. However this was not the case and no correlation was found between texting and GPA.

DISCUSSION  
 Texting has become a mainstream form of communication in the last few years and there are several beliefs about how it affects us. It is believed that texting has a negative effect on language and literacy. This may be because texting is different from other ways that we use language and many people do not follow the rules of proper English. Lack of punctuation, improper grammar, and words such as “lol” are all characteristics of texting that contribute to this belief. However this belief that texting has a negative effect on language and literacy is not entirely true. The article “Undergraduates’ Text Messaging Language and Literacy Skills” discusses that texting does not affect the literacy of those who use it. Those who had trouble with reading as children before they began texting tend to use more texting words (Grace 868). These difficulties with reading could not have been caused by texting but those who have them can develop a negative attitude towards texting’s effect on literacy because of it. It has also been shown that the amount of time that someone has been texting for or the frequency at which they text does not have a negative effect on literacy (Grace 868).

Texting’s effect on writing, on the other hand, does seem to be negative. Incorrect punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and even slang words from texting can be found in students’ writing (Risto 108-120). Young people use texting as their primary form of communication and the way that they write their texts can affect the way that the write academically. In both my research and Risto’s it was found that students did not believe that their texting affected their writing. However, these common characteristics of texting can be found in many students’ academic writing (Risto 93). Because of its popularity among young people, texting is the main way that students are writing. And whether they are aware of it or not, students include things from texting in their writing because they are used to writing in that way. While texting may not have a profound effect on students’ language, it stills manages to influence it in some way.

In class texting has become a widespread problem for students and teachers alike. While my research was inconclusive as to whether or not texting in class affected students academically, other sources suggest that it has a negative effect. Students carry cellphones with them everywhere, including the classroom, and use them frequently. Texting in class can be a huge distraction for students and prevent them from learning the material. Sylvia McDonald found that out of three classes, the one with the most in class texting also had the lowest average grade (McDonald). This outcome seems to be expected but what is interesting is that the content of the messages sent in class can play a role in how much they affect students’ academics. If the messages being sent during class are related to the class material then it does not negatively affect students’ grades, and messages that are not relevant have a negative effect on grades though. But regardless of whether or not a text message is related to what is going on in class, the behavior of in class texting leads to students taking worse notes (Kuznekoff 359-360).

With the rise in popularity of texting there have been several problems to come with it. While texting may not have a negative effect on literacy, its impact on students and their academics needs to be addressed. Informing and educating students about the effects of texting on their writing and academics is the first step to avoid the negative consequences that can arise. The problem with texting in class is something that teachers and students need to work on. By rewarding students that do not text in class this problem could become smaller. However, it is ultimately up to those who are texting to be responsible and avoid negative consequences that can come along with texting.

Works Cited

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